

THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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VERONICA.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "AUNT MARGARET'S TROUBLE."

IN FIVE BOOKS.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER V. AN INVOLUNTARY GUEST.

By this time Mrs. Sheardown had enveloped herself and Bobby in waterproof wrappings. Maud Desmond was waiting, warmly protected by a thick shawl, at the vicar's elbow. Herbert Snowe shut and locked the harmonium. Every one was preparing to depart.

"Veronica!" called the vicar.

Miss Levincourt was still conversing with Mr. Plew.

"Veronica!" repeated her father, impatiently, "are you not coming?"

She turned round at the summons, giving her hand in a farewell grasp to the doctor as she did so.

She was very handsome.

The first thing that struck you on looking at her face, was its vivid colouring. Her skin was of a clear, pale, brown tint; and on each smooth cheek there glowed a rich blush like the heart of a June rose. She had large, dark eyes, fringed round with thick lashes, and surmounted by semi-circular eyebrows, black as ebony. Her hair was also black, shining, and very abundant. It was disposed in elaborate coils and plaits, which displayed its luxuriance to the full, and was brought down low on the forehead in crisp waves. Her lips were very red, and her teeth very white. There were defects in the form of her face. But the brilliant eyes, glancing under their arched brows, so attracted attention to themselves, that few observers were dispassionately critical enough to observe that the lower part of the face overbalanced the

upper; that the nose was insignificant; the mouth so full as to be almost coarse; and the cheeks and chin so rounded as to threaten to lose all comeliness of outline, and to become heavy in middle life. Now, however, at nineteen years of age, Veronica Levincourt was a very beautiful creature. But there was something in her face which was not so easily analysed by a casual observer as the form and colour of it. There was a dissonance in it somewhere. Most women perceived this. Many men did so also. But they perceived it as a person with a good ear, but ignorant of harmony, perceives a false note in a chord. Something jars: what, he knows not. The skilled musician comes and puts his finger on the dissonant note.

When Veronica laughed, her whole countenance grew harmonious at once. And herein lay the key to the puzzle.

The habitual expression of her face in repose seemed to contradict the brilliant glow of youth and health which made her so strikingly beautiful. The rich gipsy colour, the ripe red lips, the sparkling eyes, the gleaming teeth, seemed made to tell of light-hearted, abounding, girlish happiness. But the expression of Veronica's face when she let it fall into its habitual lines, was wistful, sad, sometimes almost sullen.

For the rest, her figure was slight and straight, and she carried herself with an erect and yet easy grace.

"Coming, papa," said she, carelessly. And then she gathered about her shoulders a scarlet cloak with a hood to it.

"You should have had your shepherd's plaid, Veronica," said her father. "That red thing is not nearly warm enough for such an evening as this."

"O, it is so becoming to Miss Levin-

court," said little Miss Turtle, the governess. She and her pupils had been watching Veronica unwinkingly all the afternoon, as their custom was.

The choir of St. Gildas dispersed. The Sheardowns drove away in their little pony-carriage, carrying with them Herbert Snowe, who usually stayed with them on Saturday evenings. Miss Turtle took her pupils, one on each arm, and her grey cloak and shabby hat with its black feather disappeared down the lane. The vicar, with his ward and his daughter, walked in the opposite direction towards their home.

The nearest way to the vicarage house was across St. Gildas's churchyard. But the melted snow lay in death-cold pools between the swelling grave-mounds, and although the lanes afforded no good walking in the present state of the weather, they were yet rather better than the way by the churchyard.

Mention has been made of a by-road through the village from Shipley Magna which skirted the garden wall of the vicarage. Mr. Levincourt and the two girls had not gone many paces down this by-road, when they perceived through the fast-gathering dusk a figure, which had evidently been on the watch for them, start and run towards them very swiftly.

"I do believe it is Jemmy Sack!" exclaimed Maud Desmond.

Jemmy Sack it was, who presently came to a sudden stop in front of the vicar, and began a breathless and incoherent speech.

"Dunnot ye be frightened, please sir, Joe Dowsett says. They ha'n't a took him into the house, please sir. And it's the same un as I seed tumble off afore. On'y this here time he's in a reg'lar swoond like. But Joe Dowsett says as ye bain't to be frightened, nor yet the young ladies nayther, please sir."

Long before the combined cross-examination of the vicar and the young ladies had succeeded in eliciting any explicit statement from Jemmy, they arrived at the garden door, and then the matter to a certain extent explained itself.

A man in a scarlet hunting coat thickly crusted with mud lay on his back in the road beneath the garden wall, and close by a heap of flint stones piled up for the use of the road-menders. On to these he had apparently been flung, for his face was cut, and a thin stream of blood trickled slowly down his forehead.

The prostrate man was totally insensible. His head was supported on the knee of Joe

Dowsett, the vicar's gardener, groom, and general factotum, who was endeavouring to pour some brandy down his throat. A carter, in a smock-frock, held a handsome horse by the bridle. Three of the village boys who had been practising in the school-room stood at a little distance looking on, and two frightened women-servants, with their aprons huddled round their shivering shoulders, peeped nervously from the garden door, and plied Joe Dowsett with shrill questions, of which he took no notice whatever.

A clamour of voices arose as soon as the vicar was perceived: but a few words will suffice to put the reader in possession of the facts of the case. The fallen man was the same gentleman whom Jemmy had seen thrown earlier in the day. The day's sport had terminated at a considerable distance from Shipley Magna. The gentleman was a stranger, had probably missed his way, and gone by roundabout roads. He had evidently at last been making for Shipley Magna, having struck into Bassett's-lane, as the by-road was called. His horse and he were both tired out, and he had begun to feel the effects of his first fall more severely than he had felt them in the heat of the chase and at the beginning of the day. The carter had perceived the gentleman's horse stumble, and at the same instant the boys returning from the school-house had appeared shouting and whooping at the end of the lane. In a moment the gentleman had been pitched heavily off his horse, and had fallen on the heap of flint stones. The carter couldn't say for sure, but he believed that the horse stumbled before the lads startled him. And now what was to be done? This question was put by Joe Dowsett, looking up at his master with the brandy bottle in his hand.

The first thing to be done was to send for a doctor. Mr. Plew would probably not have reached his own home yet. Jemmy Sack was despatched to fetch him, and set off running at a famous rate, throwing out his long legs, and followed by the other boys, to all of whom the occasion seemed to be one of intense and concentrated ecstasy.

But pending Mr. Plew's arrival, the swooning man could not lie there, with the night falling fast, and a bitter wind blowing from the marshes, that was fit, Joe Dowsett said, to freeze the very marrow in your bones.

There was no other house at hand. The

vicarage was a lonely, isolated dwelling. Joe Dowsett and the carter, with a little assistance from Mr. Levincourt, carried the stranger into the house. The women hurried to take from an old oaken press, blankets and coverlets for the spare bed. A fire was lighted in the guest's chamber—a room on the ground-floor, looking towards the garden. For that night at least, the injured man must remain at the vicarage.

Mr. Levincourt was very uneasy, and asked Joe over and over again if he thought it was serious? To which queries Joe invariably replied that it might be or it mightn't, but that for his part he didn't think 't wouldn't be much: an oracular utterance in which his master seemed to find some comfort. Veronica sat at the window, straining eye and ear to catch the first signal of the doctor's coming.

"He's quite old, this poor man, isn't he, papa?" said she, with her face pressed against the glass.

"Old? No. What do you call 'quite old?' It is difficult to judge under the circumstances, but I should say he can't be more than fifty."

"Ah! well—that's what I meant. Here is Mr. Plew at last! I hear his step on the gravel, although I can't see him yet."

Mr. Plew's opinion was not very reassuring. If the patient were not better by to-morrow, he should fear that he could not safely be moved for a day or two. Meanwhile Mr. Plew would like Dr. Gunnery of Danecester to be called in, in consultation.

When Dr. Gunnery arrived on the following afternoon, he shook his head very gravely, and said that he had no hope of the patient being able to leave his bed for some weeks. Even if—and here Dr. Gunnery lowered his voice, and reversed the movement of his head: nodding it up and down instead of shaking it from side to side—even if he pulled through at all!

CHAPTER VI. SUSPENSE.

THE vicar's first thought on hearing Dr. Gunnery's opinion, was that it behoved him (the vicar) to communicate with the family of the stranger whom Fate had thrown—literally thrown—into the midst of the quiet household at the vicarage. As it was, they could hardly have known less about him, had he dropped among them from the moon, instead of from the back of a startled horse.

But for many hours the injured man was incapable of communicating with his host. Fever set in. He became delirious at

intervals. And on no account must he be disturbed or annoyed by questions. Dr. Gunnery confirmed Mr. Plew's first statement, that no irreparable injury had been done to the stranger by his fall.

"But," said he, "he is a bad subject. If we had a young constitution, or even a sound constitution for his years, to deal with, the whole affair would be a mere trifle. But in this case it is very different."

"Very different, indeed," assented Mr. Plew.

"No stamina," continued the Danecester physician. "The whole machine is in a worn-out condition—constitution gone to the deuce."

"To the —ahem! quite so!" assented Mr. Plew, again.

"Then, Dr. Gunnery," said Mr. Levincourt, nervously, "do you mean to say that he is in danger? Dear me, this is dreadful! Really dreadful!"

But to so direct a question Dr. Gunnery could, or would, give no direct reply. He merely repeated that in his opinion Mr. Levincourt ought to lose no time in communicating with the sick man's family. And then, saying that he would return the day after to-morrow, and that meanwhile the patient could not possibly be in better hands than those of Mr. Plew, the great Danecester doctor drove away.

Beyond the facts that had come under his own eyes, the vicar knew but two circumstances regarding his involuntary guest. The first circumstance was, that he had been staying at the Crown, in Shipley Magna; the second was, that Lord George Segrave was said to be a friend of his.

Mr. Levincourt despatched a note to Lord George, and ordered Joe Dowsett (to whom the note was entrusted), to ride on from Hammick Lodge to Shipley Magna, and tell the people at the Crown what had happened.

From Hammick Lodge, Joe Dowsett brought back a very polite note.

It appeared that the acquaintance between Lord George Segrave and the stranger was of the slightest possible kind. They had met in Rome one season, and had hunted side by side on the Campagna. Lord George knew nothing whatever of the gentleman's family. His name was Gale, Sir John Gale. Lord George was deeply distressed that the vicar of Shipley and his family should be so seriously inconvenienced by this accident. At the same time he could hardly regret, on Sir John Gale's account, that the latter should

have fallen into such hands. Lord George would do himself the honour of calling at Shipley vicarage, and meanwhile he begged to know if there were any way in which he could be of service, either to Mr. Levincourt or to the invalid, under these painful circumstances.

This note, although extremely civil, left matters pretty much as they had been before. But from the Crown Inn, Joe Dowsett brought back something more tangible and unexpected.

He brought back, that is to say, Sir John Gale's foreign servant, who announced himself as "Paul," and who immediately took upon himself all the duties of waiting on the sick man.

"If you will permit, sir," said Paul, in very good English, "I will have a mattress laid by the side of my master's bed for a few nights. When Sir John gets better, and needs not to have me all night, I shall find to sleep at the village. There is a small cabaret there, as I have informed myself."

The arrival of this man, which was at first looked upon with dismay by the inmates of the vicarage, proved before long to be an inestimable comfort and relief.

In the first place, he eased the vicar's mind by taking upon himself the responsibility of communicating with Sir John's friends. Or rather he proved that no such responsibility existed. Sir John had, Paul declared, no relatives. He had neither wife nor child, brother nor sister, uncle nor cousin. He had lived a great deal abroad. Paul had not been with Sir John in England, before this winter. He would write to Sir John's agent and man of business. That was all that would be necessary.

Mr. Levincourt, never unwilling to shift responsibility on to the shoulders of others, told Paul that he must do as he thought best. There was something in the grave, steady aspect of the little man that inspired confidence. Then Paul took upon himself the whole business of the sick room. He waited by day, and watched by night. He administered the medicines. He reported progress to the doctors, with an intelligence and accuracy which won those gentlemen's good opinion very soon. He relieved the vicar's servants of all trouble as regarded Sir John Gale. He even went into the kitchen, and, with a certain grave tact which characterised him, won over old Joanna to allow him to prepare sundry articles of invalid diet for his master. He

was always at hand when wanted, and yet entirely unobtrusive. He was never tired, never sleepy, never sulky, never indiscreet.

In a word, before many days of his sojourn at the vicarage had passed over, the whole household began to wonder how they had managed to get through the few hours that had intervened between the accident, and the arrival of the admirable Paul.

He very soon contrived to let it be understood that money expenses would not at all events be added to the burthen thrown on the vicar's family by his master's accident and illness. Sir John was rich: very rich. No expense need be spared. If, even, it were deemed necessary to send to London for additional medical assistance, they need not hesitate to do so. This, however, did not appear to be desirable. And as soon as Sir John was enabled to understand his own condition, he expressed himself entirely satisfied with the skill and care of the doctors who were attending him.

Lord George Segrave fulfilled his promise of calling. Lord George was a bachelor. He was a great sportsman, and some folks said that he was too fond of other pursuits which persons holding strict views could not approve. Lord George was well known on the turf; and in his youthful days had been a patron of the Prize Ring. Without belonging to the category of those whose lives were openly scandalous, he yet was a man whose acquaintance could by no means be taken to be a certificate of good character.

Retired as was Mr. Levincourt's life at Shipley-in-the-Wold, he yet knew this much of the present occupant of Hammick Lodge, and the knowledge had not served to make Sir John Gale's enforced presence beneath his own roof the more agreeable to him.

But Lord George Segrave soon made it apparent that his acquaintance with Sir John was really and truly no closer than he had stated in his note. It need scarcely be said that Lord George had no idea what a signal service he was rendering to the invalid in his host's opinion, by disclaiming anything like intimacy with the former.

Lord George was rather good-natured, and extremely selfish, and he desired that it should be at once clearly understood that while he was willing to send his servants scouring the country on any errand for Sir John that the vicar might suggest, he (Lord George) by no means

intended to put himself to the personal inconvenience of making frequent visits of inquiry at the vicarage.

"Pray command me, Mr. Levincourt," he said, as he took his leave, "in any way. I quite feel what an uncommon bore this business must be for you. Though, as I said before, Gale may think himself in luck that he didn't get spilt on any other heap of flint stones than the one at your door. I'm sure I hope he'll pull through, and all that sort of thing. You know I had only just a kind of bowing acquaintance with him in Rome. And then he hailed me on the hunting-field at Stubbs's Corner the other day, you know, and—that sort of thing. Hammick Lodge is twelve miles from Shipley as the crow flies, you know, and—and so I'm afraid I shan't be able to look him up myself very often, you know. But I hope you will do me the favour to command me if there's anything in the world my fellows can do, or—or that sort of thing."

And then Lord George Segrave departed, feeling that he had done all that could reasonably be expected of him.

Dr. Gunnery came again and again. And Mr. Plew was unremitting in his attentions.

The house, always quiet, was now hushed into stillness. The piano remained closed. Joe Dowsett ceased to whistle as he worked in the garden. The servants stole up to bed past the door of the guest-room, making every board of the staircase creak under their elaborately cautious footfall. Paul's noiseless step glided through the passages, and he came on you like a ghost.

Riot and merriment are contagious. So are silence, and the hush of suspense. But though the vicarage was stiller than it was wont to be, it was less dull. All the household was conscious of a suppressed excitement, which was merely stirring, and did not reach to pain. Every day, every hour of the day, presented a question whose answer was deferred—Will he live or die? And on the answer to this question hung no agonised human heart—none, at least, within that house.

Was there anywhere a breast fluttered by hopes, oppressed by fears, for the sick man who lay feverish and uneasy on the stranger's bed in Shipley vicarage?

No letters came for him. No friends inquired.

He was discussed in the vicarage kitchen, and in other kitchens in the neighbourhood.

He was discussed in the village ale-house, in the farm-houses, in the tap-room and the stables of the Crown at Shipley Magna. He was spoken of, once or twice, at the different meets of the West Daneshire hunt. Lord George Segrave mentioned that he believed Gale was going on all right, you know, and that sort of thing. That was a niceish nag of his, not the one he had been riding when he was thrown, you know; no, that little chesnut. Lord George wouldn't mind having him. He wondered what the figure would be. If Gale's horses were still at the Crown, he had a good mind to go over and have another look at the chesnut, and to ask Gale's groom whether he thought his master would sell him. He supposed that Gale had had enough of hunting in England. He was doosed sorry for him, you know, and that sort of thing, but what the — could he expect? With that seat, he (Lord George) only wondered how Gale had been able to stick on his saddle five minutes! And most of the field wondered too. For it has been observed that of all the trials to which human candour, modesty, and magnanimity, are ordinarily apt to be subjected, the trial of comparing your own riding with another man's is the one that most frequently developes mortal frailty.

There was probably not a man who habitually hunted with the West Daneshire, who did not secretly nourish the conviction that his own seat on horseback was admirable, and that the majority of his friends and acquaintances rode like tailors!

Little it mattered to Sir John Gale what was said of him in parlour, kitchen, stable, or hunting-field. Little, perhaps, would it ever matter to him more. For although, as Dr. Gunnery had said, the absolute injuries resulting from the accident were trifling, and to a young and vigorous constitution would have been matters of small importance, yet in this case there seemed to be no elasticity, or power of rebound in the sick man's frame. A low fever took hold of him: a dreadful insidious fever, that might be figured as a weird phantom invisible to the eyes of men, but with two bony cruel hands, whose touch was terrible. Of these hands, one was cold as ice; the other burning, like the heart of a furnace. Alternately the viewless fingers stroked the sick man's body, drawing long shuddering thrills through every limb; or clutched him with a lingering gripe that made his very heart sick. Now, he was consumed

with scorching heat; anon, he shivered to the marrow of his bones.

Mr. Plew did not trouble his brain—or perhaps it were better to say his brain was not troubled; seeing that such fancies come to a man, or stay away from him, without any conscious exercise of his will—with any fantastic embodiment of a Fever Phantom. But he reported day after day, that Sir John was in a nasty low way—a *very* *na-asty*, low way—and that he couldn't get him to rally.

"Do you think he is troubled in his mind?" asked Mr. Levincourt. "Is his heart ill at ease? He is perfectly conscious now; and, I think, clear-headed enough to give orders. And yet Paul tells me that his master has entirely approved what has been done, and what has been left undone. He desires to see no one; has received no letters—except, as Paul tells me, one from his agent sent to the Post Office at Shipley Magna—and, in short, appears to be singularly isolated in the world, for a man of his wealth and position. I should fear his life has not been a very happy one."

"Well," said Mr. Plew, musingly, "I don't know, of course. But—but he doesn't seem to me to be at all that sort of man."

Mr. Plew's statement was vague enough: and the vicar did not care to be at the pains of probing the little surgeon's meaning. Yet the latter had a meaning, although he would have found it difficult to put it into clear words.

His meaning was this; that from his observation of Sir John Gale, he had, half instinctively, drawn the conclusion that his rich patient was not a man to allow sentimental troubles to prey on him.

Wounded love, tender regrets, affectionate yearnings after a lost friendship, or a longing for softer tendance and closer companionship than could be had from servants and strangers, did not seem to Mr. Plew likely to enter into the category of drawbacks to Sir John's recovery.

Material comforts, nay luxuries, he did not lack. As to sentiment—Mr. Plew of course had encountered ailments arising from purely spiritual causes. Very troublesome ailments they were, and very inefficacious proved the power of physic to cure them. He remembered a saying of an old clergyman who had been a famous preacher in the days when Benjamin Plew was walking the hospitals in London. The saying was to the effect that the bodily health of half the world

would be marvellously improved, if a mechanical cunningly contrived piece of granite could be substituted for a heart of flesh in the human breast. "We might defy the doctors then," said this old clergyman, "and—life would not be worth having!" But of Sir John Gale, neither Mr. Plew nor the reader, as yet knows enough to enable him to judge whether the baronet's heart be of flesh or of stone.

A fortnight passed: three weeks: a month had nearly dragged itself away since the accident, when the doctors pronounced that Sir John was somewhat stronger.

The phantom hands, the hand of fire and the hand of ice, slowly relinquished their prey. By degrees the intervals between their alternate touches grew wider. At last they ceased. Danger was over; and from the beginning of March, the invalid began slowly, but surely, to mend.

WHAT BECOMES OF THINGS?

WHAT becomes of the enormous quantity of objects, natural and artificial, which are daily, weekly, monthly, annually, perennially, produced and sent forth into the world?

What becomes (to plunge in *medias res*) of all the pictures which our painters paint, and exhibit, at the metropolitan and provincial exhibitions, season after season, year after year? We see them at the Royal Academy, at the Asylum for Rejected Contributions to the Royal Academy, at the Water-colour Galleries, and at all the other Art Exhibition Rooms. What becomes of them all? Of some of them—the best—we know the fate. They go into the hands of certain collectors in the manufacturing districts who luckily have a taste for art. Of some others we also know the fate. They hang up in the studios of our friends who painted them. Sometimes, again, we come upon one in some carver's and gilder's shop. But where are all the rest? Where are the views of "Bettws-y-coed" and of "Loch Coruisk," the production of which has necessitated long journeyings and much sitting out under white umbrellas? Where are the representations of Dead Game, the Italian Peasants, the "Studies of Heads"?

The books, again, what becomes of them? These come out in legions, season after season, representing, in addition to an enormous amount of labour of different kinds, a considerable accumulation of actual material: of paper, of metallic types, of ink, of millboard, of cloth, of leather. What becomes of all this matter? What sort of proportion do the number of books that are sold, bear to those that are brought out? And, again, of those that *are* sold, what becomes? Those that we see on the

shelves of libraries, or even lying about upon tables and chiffonniers, are but a small percentage of the number continually issuing from the press. What becomes of the thousand-page novels which appear, in great numbers, in the course of every season? How does it happen that our rooms are not entirely surrounded with full book-shelves, or that there exists in any apartment, hall, or passage, any vacant portion of flat space unoccupied by books on which to put things down? Hundreds of thousands of volumes are cast upon the world every year, and have been since one is afraid to say when; where are they all at this present writing? The booksellers' shops furnish an account of some, the librarians of others, and some the trunkmakers and the buttermen know about, but the rest—where are they?

In these days, as in all the days which have preceded these days, all sorts of articles of wearing apparel become the mode, are worn for a short time by everybody, and are then by everybody cast off and rejected. What is the destiny of those rejected articles? When steel petticoats disappear, what becomes of them?

When the ordinary hat worn by Englishmen is reduced to a height of from six to six and a half inches, what becomes of the hats, seven and eight inches high, of which the hatters' shops were full a few months ago? Where are the Wellington boots, of which the shoemakers' shops used to display long rows? Where are the steel châtélains which ladies used to carry at their girdles? Where are the Malacca canes of our youth? Even the footmen have discarded their use, we know; but what has become of them? They must be somewhere, in some form. Where? And in what form?

Numbers of people have entirely bewildered and stupefied themselves in endeavours to arrive at some rational conclusion on the subject of pins. The statistical accounts of the numbers of pins turned out annually at Birmingham and Sheffield alone, would lead one to expect that the earth itself would present the appearance of a vast pincushion. Where are those pins of which the yearly fabrication is on so vast a scale? Pins are not consumed as an article of diet. Pins do not evaporate. Pins must be somewhere. All the pins which have been made since civilisation set in, must be in existence in some shape or other; we ought to see nothing else, look in what direction we might, but pins. This island, not to meddle with other countries, ought to be knee deep in pins. Reader, how many pins are imported into your own house in the course of the year? Do you know what becomes of those pins? There are a few in your wife's pincushion, and one may occasionally be seen gleaming in the housemaid's waistband; but where are the rest? It is perfectly astounding how seldom one encounters a pin "on the loose." Now and then, by rare chance, as when a carpet is taken up, you may catch a glimpse of a pin lying in a crevice; but even this is an uncommon occurrence, and not to be

counted upon. You often want a pin, and take trouble to get a pin. Where are all the pins that ought to be always in attendance everywhere?

What can possibly become of all the steel pens, of which myriads are continually turned loose upon the world? Each individual pen does not last for a very long time. Left unwiped, as they generally are, steel pens soon begin to corrode and to get unfit for use. What do we do with them? We take them out of their holders, replace them with others, and leave the old pens lying about in the pen-trays of our desks, or where not. They are awkward things to get rid of, and mostly lie about uncared for. Still the pens, like the pins, do at last disappear. Whither? The earth is not prickly with steel pens. It ought to be; why isn't it?

What becomes of all the old gloves? (Our present inquiries leave us too breathless to make others as to the *new* gloves.) Old gloves are among the old things whose fate is hidden in the densest obscurity of all. Think of the numbers of old gloves that are cast off, and of the few old gloves that one sees about in the world. Where are they all? Where—if I may be allowed to introduce a personal matter—where are *my* old gloves? There are one or two pairs, dirty and open at the seams, lurking about in my drawers. There is, in my medicine cupboard, a bottle of sal-volatile, and one of essence of peppermint, respectively covered on the stoppers, the one with a grey, and the other with a yellow, kid glove, which, if they had voices, might cry, with the lepers of old, "Unclean! Unclean!" But what are these in proportion to the vast numbers of my old gloves? Where are the rest? Where, not to confine this inquiry too much, are the old gloves of my friends? Where are the old gloves of my enemies? Where are the old gloves of those who are neither my friends nor my enemies? Where are the old gloves of all mankind?

It is a difficult question to solve, this. A glove is a tough and uncompromising customer to deal with. We cannot conceive of him as dissolved into a pulp, and made paper of; nor can we imagine a thousand or so of him interdigitated and sewn together to make a patchwork quilt. Yet some function or other must be fulfilled by these old servants, and when their career at balls, at concerts, at opera celebrations, at garden parties, at horticultural shows, at weddings, at funerals, is brought to a close, there must be something still in store for them. For, if it were otherwise, and they were simply left to kick about the world unheeded, it could not be but that we should continually meet old gloves in society, or, retiring into the wilderness to meditate, should find them flying before the wind, like the sands of the desert.

The question what becomes of the old boots and shoes, is not quite so hard of solution. They are worn longer, and reduced to a much more abject condition of wreck pre-

vious to abandonment, than the old gloves. We see them, indeed, if we look about us, in use as long as fragments of leather will hold together, and, even after that grievous hour, when they will hold together no longer, when patching and sewing and nailing are alike ineffective, we still see shreds and patches of them lying about on dunghills and cinder-heaps, decaying until they become at last unrecognisable, and are old boots and shoes no longer.

What becomes of a great proportion of the produce with which nature supplies us so liberally? What, to take an entirely mad-denying instance, becomes of cabbages? The number of cabbages which the earth brings forth, in comparison to the number of which man is able to take cognisance in a cooked state, is disproportionate in the extreme. Go where you will (except in the paved streets of our towns), you find cabbages growing. In the country, in the suburbs, in the dingy back regions where the town melts into the suburbs, there are cabbages. The market gardens of Fulham, Chelsea, Battersea, Dulwich, Clapham, of the whole neighbourhood round about London, seem to contain nothing but cabbages. In amateur gardens, walled-in acres or half acres lying outside the pleasure-garden, I observe the fruits of the earth to be cabbages; the markets seem to be organised almost exclusively for the development of the cabbage trade; the stalls round Covent Garden are piled up with cabbages; the great carts which pursue an eastward course through Piccadilly, rolling along that thoroughfare all the night, are piled up to the height of the second-floor windows with cabbages.

But what becomes of the cabbages? How rarely does one see a cabbage either on one's own table, or on the tables of friends! Once or twice in the course of the spring, a cabbage may appear as an item in the bill of fare, but no oftener. It is said that cabbages are largely consumed in the poorer neighbourhoods; but to account for the number of cabbages produced, it would be necessary for the inhabitants of all kinds of neighbourhoods, rich and poor, not only to consume cabbages largely, but to live upon cabbages.

What a mass of matter must be furnished by the uneatable portions of the shell-fish which appear on our tables! What legions of oyster-shells must accumulate during the long period when there is an R in the month. The grottoes do not account for many; and, besides—what becomes of the grottoes? At all times of the year, both when there is an R in the month and when there is not, there is a steady consumption of lobsters and crabs; yet the roads are not crimson with their uneatable remains. They do not the "multitudinous" fields "incarnadine, making the green one red." May I ask what becomes of the shells of the peas, of the egg-shells, of the potato parings, of the asparagus—of every head of which so little is eaten and so much is left? Send away your plate, after

eating an artichoke. Not to ask what becomes of the plate (though I should like to know), I entreat you to consider the leaves.

Seriously speaking, and all exaggeration apart, it seems as if the bulk of matter which all this accumulation of objects suggests, must be something so enormous as sensibly to increase the mass of the earth. One would expect to find great hillocks of all sorts of heterogeneously formed material obstructing our road-ways, rising up to the first-floors of our houses, impeding our progress when we would move, obliging us to force our way through with steam rams. Yet it is not so. I do not suppose that there is any material difference in the elevation of the soil, caused by this accumulation of things, even in the now thickly populated neighbourhoods. Yet I would expect to find, added on to the earth's crust, a new modern stratum of the conglomerate sort, made up of pins, penny newspapers, old gloves, cabbage-stalks, orange-peel, old tooth-brushes, worn-out boots, steel pens, used lucifer-matches, and all the other produce which goes on for ever accumulating around and about us, and of the ultimate fate of which we know little or nothing. It is possible that such a stratum exists, but one hears nothing about it. It is not reported on by learned societies, nor recorded in scientific journals, nor, when cuttings are made through metropolitan soil, in order to the construction of district railroads, do we see streaks of soil made up of these objects, exhibited in section.

There certainly would appear to be some process in nature, causing things to disappear. At all events, they *do* disappear. I have seen a road mended in the country, and that in some district where there has been very little traffic, with such extraordinary and anomalous materials as broken bottles, brickbats, old saucepans, battered hats, hob-nailed shoes, and the like; and I have seen many of these objects lying for weeks and months without becoming incorporated with the main substance of which the road was made. And yet at last they have disappeared! For half a year at least, the old boot or the battered saucepan has been there, drifting from place to place, occupying now the centre of the lane, now the side, and by-and-by lurking in a secret place under the hedge; still there the thing has been, and I have seen no cause or just reason why it should not remain there in its integrity a hundred years. But I have left, for a time, the part of the country in which the saucepan-mended road was; and when I came back a year afterwards, that battered vessel was gone. It is so, again, with indoor rubbish, or with things not exactly coming under that denomination which you never use and never want. The things disappear. You do not consign them to the dust-hole, or put them in the fire; you merely cease to use them, or to take note of their existence; and in the course of time, longer or shorter, as the case

may be, they go. They dissolve, or evaporate, or in some other way cease to exist, and, to our great relief, we see them no more.

One of the last phases of all under which matter that has lost all distinctness and identity, appears, is that most mysterious substance which we call *flue*. What a strange institution is that, requiring for its development nothing but neglect! Passing a decorator's shop the other day, I noticed, on a coat of arms with which he had embellished his wire blind, the motto, "*Nil sine labore*"—"Nothing without labour." It struck me at the time as much too sweeping a statement; and now, pausing for a moment to reflect on flue, I find a means of confuting this reckless assertion. Flue is to be had without labour. Let things alone, and flue is the result. Let your bedstead alone, and see how the flue accumulates underneath it. Let your chest of drawers alone, and observe how the flue gathers behind that piece of furniture. Let your pockets alone, and note what a curious little pellet, composed of flue, forms in the corners of each of those receptacles. I have just extracted such a pellet from one of the pockets of an old waistcoat. I wonder of what it may be the remains—Julius Caesar's toga—the stuffing of the great Alexander's saddle? Both existed once—and what became of them?

PRIZE BABIES.

RISING early one morning in July, bent on visiting Wimbledon and seeing the prize shooting, I was somewhat surprised to find myself, later in the day, sailing down the river to Woolwich to see the prize babies. Chance had caused this change in my plans, and had also given me, as a travelling companion, a poet who pledged himself to beguile the journey (if required) by reciting his own verses and abusing Tennyson's. At Westminster we embarked upon the good steamer *Heron*, Captain Wattles, and found the boat crowded with people, also bound for the Baby Show. After an interval that seemed long enough for a voyage to New York, the steamer approached the North Woolwich Gardens, at which the Baby Show was held. We saw the flags flying; we heard the drums beating; but, in accordance with a peculiarly English institution, we were not yet allowed to go on shore. There is a ferry between North Woolwich on one side of the river, and South Woolwich on the other side of the river, and it is necessary that this ferry shall be made to pay. Consequently, the steamer crept past North Woolwich, made fast to the pier at South Woolwich, and left us to be reconveyed across the river, at an additional charge, by the ferry-boat. Two tall and handsome soldiers, indignant at what they considered an imposition, refused to go on board the ferry-boat, and hired a skiff in which to row across. As no two tall and handsome soldiers were afterwards to be seen in Woolwich Gardens, it is to be presumed that these rebels paid with their lives the

penalty of their rashness in opposing the authorities. At least, this is the poet's theory, and he intends to work it out in a song which shall quite eclipse Kingsley's story of the three fishers who went sailing out into the west, out into the west when the sun went down.

The gardens at Woolwich are very prettily laid out. There is a miniature lake, backed by scenery; there are two orchestras and two dancing-floors; there is a fine esplanade along the river; there are all sorts of games, from Aunt Sally to rifle galleries; and there are trees and flowers in plenty. Altogether, an excellent place at which "to spend a happy day," and one would say as favourite a resort for the people of the east end of London, as Cremorne for the people of the west end.

Obviously, the thousands of spectators at the Baby Show came mostly from the lower part of the city. Servants out for a holiday, mechanics with their wives and children, young people who had come to join in the dancing after nightfall, composed the majority of the visitors. Everybody rushed off at once to see the babies, who were exhibited in a small hall and in a tent adjoining. The sight was by no means pleasant. A single baby is not only endurable, but is often absolutely attractive; but a miscellaneous collection of babies is the reverse of either. About one hundred and twenty children, of ages ranging from seven weeks to eighteen months, were on view. Railings had been erected up and down the hall, and, behind these, looking disagreeably like pigs in their pens, sat the mothers holding their infants. The weather was very warm, and the odour of boiled milk and pap mingled with the steaming perspiration of the crowd. Many of the children were asleep, and were laid out on the benches or on the nurses' knees, in attitudes horribly suggestive of their being dead. There was but one pretty baby in the show. This was a little girl, about a year and a half old, with bright black eyes, and enough hair to serve a dozen grown-up women in this age of chignons. This pretty little girl was greatly petted. All sorts of sweets were offered for her acceptance, and pennies and halfpennies were pushed into her hands. The other children suffered by comparison. Indeed, when the poet casually remarked that he had never thought that babies could be so ugly, the sentiment was cordially endorsed by several matrons, who had overheard it, and it was approvingly repeated throughout the hall as a very original and accurate bit of criticism.

But although there were no beautiful babies, there were numbers of fat babies, and large babies, and healthy babies. A gipsy woman carried in her arms a perfect little Hercules, as brown and rosy as herself, and with eyes almost as keen and quick as hers. Half-a-dozen stupid little monsters sprawled in a row, the flesh lying in rolls upon their arms and legs, and their cheeks bulging with fatness. As a contrast to these, there were the "Triplets," only seven weeks old—poor, puny creatures with

flat, idiotic faces. It is difficult to avoid being haunted by these Triplets. They were like the ghosts of babies. With their pinched features they seemed prematurely old, and yet they were so incomplete as to give one the idea that they were prematurely new. If this appear paradoxical, it is the fault of the Triplets. All the children present being competitors for prizes, I was astonished to see so many purely ordinary babies. The most of them were remarkable for nothing. They were neither very large, nor very small, nor very anything, except very clean. That, the proprietor of the show insisted upon, as a condition of admission. The mothers, too, were very neatly dressed. It was, however, apparent that they were mostly poor people who had brought their babies to the show solely for the sake of the money prizes. The proprietor had also bound himself to furnish the women with refreshments during the exhibition, and the prospect of unlimited porter and tea was doubtless a powerful inducement to exhibitors. I noticed that the majority of the women had come from the country. London was in a decided minority of mothers, as compared with Lancashire. They all seemed very contented, pleased with the attentions bestowed by the visitors upon their charges, but still more pleased when those attentions assumed the form of a pecuniary offering, however limited. They all agreed that Mr. Holland, the proprietor of the show, was "a real gentleman" and "had acted fair and honest in everything he said and done." The proprietor was equally well pleased with the conduct of the exhibitors, and liberally added silver cups to the money premiums he had promised.

The prizes were for triplets, twins, the finest boy, and the finest girl. They varied in value from fifteen to five pounds. Little difficulty was found by the judges in making their selections, and the awards appeared to satisfy all concerned. When the idea of a Baby Show was originated, several years ago, by American Barnum, it was thought in the first place, that nobody would be willing to exhibit a baby, and in the second place, that nobody would be willing to pay to see the babies if any were exhibited. These fears turned out to be groundless, and there is really no other show so easy to get together and so popular. In the present case, the proprietor merely inserted his prospectus in a few country papers, and more than two thousand babies were offered for exhibition. The day on which the show opened, will long be memorable at Woolwich. Twenty-three hundred mothers, provided with more than that number of infants, appeared at the gardens, many having travelled hundreds of miles for the purpose. To convince most of these women that, for some reason or other, their children were ineligible, was an almost hopeless task. The women screamed; the children screamed; a baby Babel was improvised on the instant. The proprietor, frightened at the storm he had innocently provoked, was compelled to hide

himself from the furious mob of mothers. Several hours elapsed before the ground could be cleared of superfluous infants and the fortunate few arranged in rows for the inspection of the public. About thirty thousand spectators are reported to have attended the show during the four days on which it was kept open. These people paid a shilling each, and also benefited the proprietor by purchasing refreshments. As a pecuniary speculation, therefore, the Baby Show was successful, and will surely be repeated in other parts of the country. A portion of the press has protested against it very vigorously, on account of its indecency, and the danger of infecting children with each other's diseases. As to indecency, it is unquestionably true that for a Baby Show there must be babies; that babies in warm weather wear very little clothing; that nursing mothers of the class of these mothers are not particularly diffident in regard to the display of the upper part of their figures. But the spectators were nearly all of the same class as the exhibitors, and took the maternal displays as a matter of course. There were no indecencies. The conversation, though not refined, was certainly not gross. As to danger of infection, all the babies on exhibition were presumed to be in good health. Such a show is unquestionably an offence against good taste; but as it is prepared by persons who have no good taste, and is patronised by those who do not trouble themselves with æsthetic questions, this objection goes for nothing. I think that the poet put the matter very neatly when he said: "It is a very good show—for those who like it."

As a rule, I do not believe that people do like it. Crowds go out of curiosity, but, after seeing the show, do not look pleased. In point of fact, a Baby Show is very commonplace. After all, it is only one hundred children in one room. The preternaturally large babies, or the remarkably small babies, are in too great demand for booths and caravans at country fairs to waste their sweetness on a Baby Show for the sake of a doubtful prize. Many of the mothers who bring their children are women who would beg with the babies, or hire the babies out to other beggars, or tell fortunes with the babies in their arms, or do anything else with the babies to get money. Free food and drink for four days, and the chance of ten or fifteen pounds at the end of four days, to be earned by simply sitting on a stool and nursing a child, this is an opportunity very seldom offered to poor women, and no wonder that it is gladly accepted by those who have no delicate scruples about facing the public. It is easier than doing charwork. It is not more public than attending the customers at a costermonger's barrow, or picking up the sticks at Aunt Sally. It is more pleasant than many of the occupations in which these women are ordinarily engaged. The babies, also, are cleaner, better fed, and better nursed, than they would have been during the same time at home. There are four days' clear gain to the babies;

that is quite evident. The hall may be crowded and the atmosphere bad; but the crowd and the atmosphere in the garret at home are worse. Granted the danger of contagious disease, if you insist upon it; but there is most danger where there is most dirt; and the hall at Woolwich is a paradise compared with the homes of the babies. Thus, as the proprietor increases his profits, and the mothers pick up a little extra money, and the babies are more comfortable than usual, the only people who have anything of which to complain are the spectators, who really do not get the worth of their shillings. You are promised a show of babies, and you behold the babies; but still you are disappointed by the babies. You know that you have no cause of complaint against the proprietor, and yet you feel that you have been deluded, and you would like to call him a humbug. This is very irrational, but very natural. Most persons find it impossible to be interested in other people's babies.

Among the visitors to the show at Woolwich the women outnumbered the men, at least three to one. I asked several women why they had come to the show? Some said that they wanted to see "what it was like." Others were anxious to see how the prize babies compared with their own particular babies. Questions as to the result of this comparison, they invariably replied to by a smile, a simper, and a quick, triumphant toss of the head which spoke volumes of satisfaction. After the visitors relieved the exhibitors by taking care of the babies for a few moments, a few young men made themselves conspicuous by setting up as amateur nurses. Babies, passed from hand to hand, often made the circuit of the hall before they were returned to their mothers. The poet having gloomily suggested, in rather a loud voice, his fears lest the children should get mixed, a shout of dissent and reprobation broke out unanimously. Great excitement was caused by the appearance of a woman attended by a police detective. Her baby, whom she described as "a very fine, large, stout boy," had been stolen from her lodgings the night before; and the detective, in his wisdom, had suggested that it might have been taken by some speculator with a view to securing a valuable prize at Woolwich. This was too clever to be true. The woman examined all the babies, and declared that her own was not among them. This incident struck the poet very forcibly. He saw in it, the basis for a romance that would surpass the best efforts of the elder Dumas. You had only to suppose that, by some accident, there happened to be a baby on exhibition which, without being the child that was stolen, sufficiently resembled it to deceive the mother. Then the child would be claimed; the detective would insist upon taking it away with him; the real mother would be overwhelmed. "There! you can easily work it out for yourself," said the poet. Thanking him warmly (but insincerely) for this valuable contribution to literature, I proceeded to remark the absence of the fathers of the babies. All the women were

married, two or three, indeed, were widows, but the husbands and fathers who permitted the exhibition did not make their appearance. Some men came at night, to help carry the babies home; but I was informed that these declared themselves to be brothers or cousins of the exhibitors. We missed very little, however, by not being indulged with a sight of the fathers; for all the women who were questioned on the subject, asserted that the babies were the images of their fathers, and we could readily enlarge the pictures for ourselves if we felt inclined. In truth, I believe that the fathers acted prudently in staying away. There was a deal of rough chaff flying about during the day, and the chaffers would have made it very hot for any father who had offered himself to public inspection. To do the spectators justice, none of them approved of the exhibition except by their presence. None had a good word to say of it. Some called it "a lark," and some "a rum go," and "a queer start;" but if any one had proposed that the women and the babies should be sent home forthwith, I don't believe that one of the spectators would have objected, or would have demanded his money back.

Sitting over our whitebait in the neat little hotel attached to the gardens, the poet and I tried to think of some other exhibition that should be as absurd and as profitable as the Baby Show. Finally, we hit upon the exhibition of married couples, and communicated our discovery to the waiter, with all the pride of Columbus. Bless you! the proprietor had thought of that long ago, and was even then labouring over the idea in his mind, trying to give it some practicable shape. He rather thought he should hinge it upon something like the old flitch of bacon business, with a grand procession, a jury of old maids and bachelors, and all the ancient paraphernalia. This was a secret, however, and must not be let out just yet. A secret it should have remained, so far as I am concerned but for the fact that the manager of another garden, at the west end, has already anticipated the idea and advertised the married-couples show. But will any married couples consent to exhibit themselves for such a purpose? Without doubt, dozens. The manager will have an embarrassment of applicants. Do not suppose that the matter will end with the distribution of prizes for matrimonial felicity. The mania for this sort of show will have its day, and will go much further. There are thousands of persons ready to run wildly after every new thing, and to run all the more wildly if it be suggested that the new thing is rather improper. Let these people go but once out of curiosity, and, no matter whether they like the show or not, the manager is enriched. It is upon this principle that speculations of the character of the Woolwich Baby Show, are undertaken; and the shrewdness of this managerial judgment of human nature is shown by the fact that such speculations succeed where sensible enterprises fail.

The public is to blame for this, and must

accept the responsibility. Let us reform the public and it will be easy to do away with objectionable shows. At the Baby Show there was nothing to justify police interference; but nevertheless some writers called upon the police to break it up, with a childlike faith in the efficiency of the constituted authorities that would be admirable if it were not ridiculous. The Woolwich manager might have exhibited the babies in a state of nudity had he been so minded, and the show would have been successfully concluded before the authorities had decided whether they ought to interfere, whose business it was to interfere, and under what law interference would be strictly legal. Getting on by degrees, we may get a Show before very long, that will suggest to Somebody, M.P. for Somewhere, the vast idea of hinting the propriety of a revision of the licensing system in connexion with public entertainments. At about the same time, perhaps, the public will grow so refined, as to ask for this revision, or to demand it. Anyhow, both the poet and myself are hopeful enough to believe that the prize babies at Woolwich will never send *their* babies to a Baby Show.

A SUMMER SUNSET.

GREEN islands in a golden sea,
With amethyst cliffs that melt away
At every wash of the sleepy wave,
White towering Alps that greet the day;
And still through rents in the further space
Glimpses of distant ocean bed,
Burning with restless changeful light,
And veined with flushes of glory spread,
Far as the living are from the dead,
Far as the blessed are from hell's night.
Then the islands grow to radiant realms,
And shoot forth golden tongues of land,
And the Alps fade down to a level plain,
Where monsters troop in a threatening band;
Then murky towers, where ghosts can reign,
Rise like a wizard's dying dream;
While low in the west in a narrow vein
There spreads, through the dusk, one golden beam,
Like heaven's last and lingering gleam
Seen through hell's vista by those in pain.
Nature is changeful, and, like the sea,
Has its autumn ebb and its summer flow.
Cloudlets of morning pass with dawn;
Who can tell where the sunbeams go;
Dead flowers turn to mere earth at last,
Earth to blossoms breaks forth in May,
Life and death are ever at war
On this great chameleon world, I say;
Yet cloud or river, or leaf on the tree
Is not so changeful, it seems to me,
As a woman's mind—that a feather can sway.

AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

HE was a sturdy thick-set man in a holiday suit of new fustian, and with bewilderment written in every line of his honest face. The oracle of his party, and the guide-in-chief to three male and two female friends, as well as to their commingled families, he had evidently pledged himself to carry them through the Museum successfully, and was now in mortal dread

of losing his reputation. To see him dodging the statues in the Egyptian Gallery was a spectacle for gods and men. The numerous effigies of the cat-headed divinity, Pasht, and the two colossal heads of Amenophis, caused him deep anxiety; for the attention of the ladies was riveted on the first, and the children put an infinite variety of perplexing questions respecting the second. "Here's another one of that there Pasht," remarked one of the former, on reading the name on the pedestal. "What made her so fond of 'aving herself took, I wonder, for she ain't no beauty to look at?" "Is she Egyptian for Puss in Boots?" asked another. "Was Mennyoppis a good man, father?" chimed in a sharp lad of twelve, who had begged to carry the green guide-book in his own hand, and was puzzling himself over the names and descriptions it gives. The other three men looked profoundly miserable, and, as they paced the long chamber, preserved a moody silence, now and again looking askance at the first hapless mortal, addressed as Joe, but forbearing to add to his troubles by a single word. One of these was a corpulent, florid being, with a shiny face and a merry eye, whose frock-coat evidently impressed him with a sense of unusual responsibility; for he stuck out his chest like a black pointer pigeon, and until the one button fastened over it seemed bursting with indignation, and moved his arms round and round in windmill fashion with a slow regularity curious to see. There is a curve in the stuck-up elbow, which could only have been acquired in one way. Not by driving—that gives a more jerky and knowing upward twist; not by carrying heavy weights—that makes the hands big and the knuckles wrinkled and rugose, and our friend's fist is smooth and podgy; not by digging, nor hammering, nor by severe manual labour of any kind, for there is a certain daintiness about his movements which does not come from violent exercise, but which yet suggests shirt-sleeves and busy hands. An odd remembrance of a certain metropolitan shop-window flits before you, and you have your friend's calling at last. That oleaginous look about the hair and skin, that meaty plumpness, those full lips and rosy cheeks, mark the professional carver at a well-known ham-and-beef shop; and those large elbows have acquired their curve in supplying ounces from the brisket and slices from the round. A snow-white apron ordinarily covers that capacious paunch, and a linen jacket or a waistcoat and shirt do duty for

that most uncomfortable coat. Mentally ticking him off as Ham, you turn to the tall, thin, cadaverous man by his side, whose long legs strive in vain to keep step with his companion's waddle, and see, or think you see, that he is a journeyman tailor; and that the shorter man in the shabby shooting jacket, sells buttons and trimmings on commission. They have gone to make a day of it at the British Museum, at the suggestion of the worried guide in fastian, and, finding it an utter failure, are now thinking ruefully of a certain dry skittle-alley, where the mild porter is unexceptionable; of Gravesend steamers and shrimps; of vans to Hampton Court; of Greenwich Park; of the Eagle Tavern; of snug pipes in suburban arbour, with a glass of something comfortable after tea. For they are not happy among the relics of ancient Egypt; the scarabæus and amulets tell them nothing they can understand, and can, they say, be outmatched any day in the Lowther Arcade; the statues only seem stiffer and uglier than those adorning their favourite Sunday pleasure-garden; the mummies are curious, "if you really believe they've ever been alive," but they've rather a fusty smell, my dear, and one gets tired of looking at them, even, after a time; and as for the "specimens of unburnt bricks, and the stupid rows of little birds and queer marks on stone, which Joe says was their way of writing, why, they only prove what confounded fools the Egyptians must have been not to bake their clay and to write like other people. The stuffed monkeys were funnier than those bits of broken stone, and I vote we go up-stairs again, if we're to stay any longer in the musty old crib." Thus Ham, when the Lycian Gallery was reached. Joe had read out, slowly and lugubriously, from the catalogue, "No. 125, Eastern pediment, with various figures, probably divinities. No. 126, Half of the Western pediment; six warriors fighting." And the information fell upon them like a knell. There was no help for it. They were all tremendously bored, and made their way, penitent and mute, back to the Zoological collection.

It was the day after Mr. Walpole had moved the vote for the British Museum, in the House of Commons on 19th July last, that the foregoing experience occurred. An increase of some fourteen thousand pounds over the amount required last year was then asked for, and granted by our national purse-keepers; and it was to ascertain how far the pleas put forth for this extra expenditure would be justified by personal observation that our pilgrimage was made. Before dwell-

ing further upon the results of that pilgrimage, it will be well to epitomise the Museum statistics, taking Mr. Walpole's figures as our guide. The estimate for 1868-9 was ninety-nine thousand three hundred and eighty pounds, and that for the ensuing financial year one hundred and thirteen thousand two hundred and three pounds, the increase being caused, according to Mr. Walpole, by twelve thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine pounds being required for new buildings and repairs, and an extra sum of one thousand one hundred and forty pounds being needed for additional catalogues. The steady increase in the number of "persons admitted to see the general collections of the Museum," and for "purposes of study," was properly quoted as a matter for public congratulation, and the House of Commons cheered on learning that, whereas there were but three hundred and sixty-five thousand nine hundred visitors to the general collections in 1864, there were four hundred and sixty-one thousand in 1868, while those admitted to the reading-room in the same period rose from four hundred and seventy-seven thousand to five hundred and seventy-five thousand. Mr. Walpole urged, too, the "enormous utility of accurate and exhaustive catalogues," and explained that those relating to Hebrew literature were completed, and that the one of Spanish literature was in progress, and wound up his statement by saying that the accounts of the British Museum were now submitted periodically to the Audit Office, and were "specifically audited from month to month," so that the House of Commons had every check upon the disbursement of the money it was asked to vote.

There is not a word to be said against any of these statements. The wretched sheds, like worn-out photographic vans, or the superannuated bathing-machines of a race of giants, which have lumbered up the court-yard, and disfigured the entrance to the British Museum for years, conceal, as is well known, some of the choicest specimens of ancient sculpture, and other objects of antiquarian interest. These last have been stowed out of sight, like things to be ashamed of, ever since they came into the hands of the trustees; and the enlargement of the room containing the Elgin marbles, and the final excavation for, and recovery and display of, many noble masterpieces is matter for national congratulation. Students, too, having increased, have cause for thankfulness in the care taken to supply

their wants; and the grandest and best appointed public reading-room in the world will become an even greater boon than it is to men of letters, as the guide books and other facilities for consulting its treasures increase. It is pleasant to think of "the Museum Flea," and the many other abuses of the old reading-room, as utterly extirpated; and of most of the strikingly trenchant evidence given by Mr. Carlyle as obsolete. Idle loungers still take up the room which might be more profitably occupied by diligent workers; but it seldom happens that any of these last are unable to obtain a seat, and the imbecile who was sent every day to the reading-room by pious relatives, wishing to keep him out of harm's way, has, we would fain hope, no representatives in our day. Not that there are not plenty of eccentric people always to be seen in the reading-room. The untidy, the unkempt, the unwashed, the chattering, the vacuous of both sexes find their way there; and that the trustees had to remonstrate, not very long ago, upon the parasitically animated condition of a reader's coat, and out of deference to his fellow-readers, to exclude him till it was purified, seems to prove that the keeper of printed books does not err on the side of exclusiveness in the conditions under which he grants tickets for the library.

The man of education is thoroughly provided for at the British Museum. It addresses itself to his tastes and instincts throughout; and though the terrible crowding and confusion of the various collections jars upon his sense of fitness, he is generally able to find what he wants, and knows that a staff of accomplished, courteous, and specially qualified gentlemen will delight in guiding him. But to such visitors as Ham and his fellows the Museum is an appalling enigma; the solution of which is an impossibility. They understand not a tittle of what they see; there is nothing in any of the rooms they wander through so listlessly, to make the dry bones live; and upon this class the great national treasure-house is effecting a minimum of good. It is, of course, pleasant to learn from Mr. Walpole, that a hundred thousand more visitors entered the Museum during the last twelve months than was the case four years since, but the satisfaction is greatly modified when the nature of their inspection and the tenor of their remarks are known. In the opinion of those best capable, from opportunities of observation, of judging, the British Museum

is neither appreciated nor understood by the average visitor, and repeated visits of inspection have led us to the same conclusion. There is a manifest want of sympathy with the wants and wishes of the taxpayer who needs improvement most, and to whom the Museum should be a national elevator.

But let us accompany poor Joe and his friends up the principal staircase and to the chamber where our old friend the stuffed giraffe rears his graceful head; where the walrus exhibits his vast bulk; and full-grown gorillas from the Gaboon stare with fixed and rigid ugliness at all comers. There is more animation here and in the room adjoining than we found down-stairs. The attendant, who stands wand in hand, is not unfrequently appealed to for information, and a couple of seafaring men have a group of listeners round them, while they relate anecdotes of an extremely marvellous character concerning their own personal adventures with gorillas. These two sailors supply the element of human interest to the show, and it is instructive to mark the faces near them light up as after each story their owners turn again to the central case to examine the paws, arms, and mouths of the hideous creatures within it. When these sailors depart, not without our receiving a shrewd and humorously interrogative glance from one of them, as if to gauge the extent of our credulity, the sight-seers become dull. The antelopes are not popular. Crowded together like toy-animals shut up in a Noah's Ark, they present a confused medley of heads and horns, legs and tails, and glass eyes. Ham regards their quarters and haunches with an evidently professional eye, and has "heard they is good eating though stringy;" Joe reads from the green guide-book troublously, that "antelopes are beasts with hollow horns, and chew the cud," a statement which provokes the sallow tailor into contradiction and querulousness. "They must put something in the book" he supposes, captiously; "though for his part he doesn't see why the 'orns must be hollow at all." Mildly reminded that the horn of the domestic cow is occasionally turned to use as a drinking vessel, and that there is nothing daringly unreasonable in the supposition that the horns of antelopes are similarly formed, he gives a discontented grunt and wanders into the next room alone. Here are some foreign excursionists who are profoundly gratified with the proboscis monkey; one of the

many sentimental couples always to be found in the Museum, its vasty solitudes making it a charming meeting-place to those wishing to be alone; some children who gaze awestruck at the baboons; and two women who pace slowly on, absorbed in talk, and look neither to the right nor left. The attendants answer all questions politely, but seldom volunteer information, and the general impression conveyed here, as down-stairs, is that both officials and visitors are weary, and that the first are longing for the hour of closing, and the second to accomplish the task of inspection they have set themselves. The overcrowding is painfully efficient in weakening interest and in confusing the mind. Go where you will you see incongruity and close packing; and through the Zoological collections and the long cases filled with birds, Joe and his friends wander open-mouthed and unhappy, though with a vague conviction that their enjoyment should be of the most rapturous kind. Even the portraits give them no pleasure, for they hang above the cases, and are too far from the line of sight for such merits as they have to be discerned.

But it is when the North Gallery, devoted to minerals and fossils, is reached, that the general dissatisfaction culminates. The guide-book is full of instructive information, but unfortunately it needs more education than our friends possess to understand it. Its style is rather close than popular, and "fossil plants with small whirls of leaves (*Asterophyllites*), from the coal-shale," or "*Stigmaria* in this case, and on the top of case four are the roots of the *Sigillaria*, which occur in the fire-clay beneath seams of coal," are extracts which convey nothing when read aloud by Joe to his friends. This is plainly felt, and so the book is shut up, and they march silently through the galleries. That the department of minerals with "Components of the Arsenoid and Thionid elements," and thousands of other specimens, as well as the botanical rooms with their excellent classification, should be shirked, was not surprising. The visitors who linger here are students; and Joe and his friends need more stimulating mental food during their rare holidays. It was vexing, though, to see them in the Assyrian room, and the Vase room, either of which would have been rendered replete with interest by the briefest oral explanation, for they evidently regarded one as a collection of stupid effigies and old stones, and the other as an

exhibition of crockery on a large scale. Yet not one of the party but would have enjoyed the bas-reliefs had they known that they actually represented the life of a people which flourished nearly three thousand years ago; if, in a word, what they saw could have been explained.

At St. Petersburg and Moscow popular explanatory lectures are given gratuitously at the national museums on certain days in the week, which the people flock to hear. Without advocating any such revolutionary change as this, may we not ask our legislators to consider whether the British Museum may not be made to perform its mission better; whether the illiterate taxpayer and sight-seer has not some claim to consideration; whether the noble galleries and the priceless curiosities stored in them should continue a sealed book to the vast majority of those visiting them? Some such query may have suggested itself to some of those who silently voted the one hundred and thirteen thousand two hundred and three pounds asked for by Mr. Walpole; but as it found no expression in Parliament, we venture to give it shape now.

"HAD" AND "WOULD."

CAN any learned lexicographer, grammarian, or philologist inform the world at what time the words "had" and "would" became synonymous in English speech, when joined with the words better, sooner, and rather? Ordinarily these words are by no means synonymous. "I *had* a dinner" and "I *would* have a dinner" are two sentences between which an hungry man, whether a grammarian or not, would speedily detect the difference. Hamlet, in his address to the players, says, "If you mouth it, as some of your players do, I'd as lief the town crier spoke my lines." Most of the editions of Shakespeare print, "I *had* as lief." Why not "*would* as lief?" It is a pity that Shakespeare did not correct his proof-sheets; for if such had been his practice, we should have known to which of the two words he lent his great example in this instance. The fact that "I *had*" and "I *would*" are both abbreviated colloquially into "I'd," explains how the convertibility of the two words in certain forms of expression became so common among talkers, though it by no means justifies the inaccuracy in writing. To use *had* where *would* is the proper word is a solecism which it would be better to avoid; or, as the offenders against the true grammatical construction would say, "*had* better be avoided."

No doubt there is great authority for the use of "had" where "would" would be more correct; but is any authority, however great, to be allowed, without protest, to degrade,

or help to degrade, our English tongue? The following examples, cited from some of the most noted English periodicals of the present day, will serve to show how unnecessary, as well as how inelegant and incorrect, is the use of "had" instead of "would," in phrases which imply preference for the doing of one thing instead of another, and in which an exercise of the will is always latent and presupposed.

Next to the great authority of Shakespeare comes that of Milton for the colloquial use of had instead of would, as in *Comus*:

But *had* we best retire? I see a storm.

This sentence means, "*would* it not be best that we should retire?" And there can be no denying that the word "*had*," if strictly admissible, conduces to brevity. But brevity is not to be purchased at the expense of elegance and accuracy, even by so great a master of the language as Milton.

The following are more recent examples of the unnecessary substitution of "had" for "would":

"*I had* as lief, she (Queen Caroline) added, be Elector of Hanover as King of England."—Lord Hervey's Letters, Blackwood's Magazine, February, 1868. This should be, "*I would* as lief."

"The man who touches them *had* better have put his head into a hornets' nest."—Hereward the Wake, by the Rev. Charles Kingsley. [It *would* have been better for the man who touches them to have put, &c.]

"Conway Dalrymple knowing that he *had* better not argue any question with a drunken man."—Last Chronicle of Barset, by Anthony Trollope. [Knowing it *would* be better not to argue, &c.]

"Had the author done so, even under such professional revision, there *had* doubtless been fewer misdemeanours against nature, good taste, and propriety."—Douglas Jerrold, Weekly News, October 15, 1854. [There *would* doubtless have been, &c.]

"The case was one which at all events in the interest of the defendant, *had* far better not have been brought into court."—Speech of Mr. Coleridge, Q.C., in the Court of Queen's Bench, February 1, 1868. [It *would* have been far better in the interests of the defendant if the case had not been brought into court.]

"Her fearless crew confess, that they *had* rather not make the voyage again."—Daily Telegraph, August 22, 1866: in an article on the arrival of the Red, White, and Blue, from New York. [The substitution of *would* for *had* is all that is necessary to convert this quotation into correct English.]

"The account of the suggestion, however, *had* better be given in Richardson's own words."—Blackwood's Magazine, March, 1869. [The account would be better if given in Richardson's own words.]

It must be said for the writers of the present day, that though great offenders in the use of these colloquialisms, they are but the copyists of

their predecessors in the eighteenth century. In No. 71 of the Tatler, Sir Richard Steele writes: "Mr. Bickerstaffe," said he, "*had* you been to-night at the play you *had* (would have) seen the force of action in perfection," and in No. 45, the same writer says, "Had the family of the Beadstuffs known of your being lately at Oxon, we *had* in our own names and in the University's made you a compliment?" instead of, "we *would* in our own name have made you a compliment." Addison, whose reputation, as one of the correctest and most elegant of English writers, has not been impaired by the lapse of more than a century and a half, constantly makes use of "had" for "would have." Telling, in No. 407 of the Spectator, the story of a barrister who was accustomed to twist and untwist a piece of thread around his finger when pleading in Westminster Hall, he adds, "one of his clients, who was more merry than wise, stole the thread from him in the midst of his pleading; but he *had* better have let it alone, for he lost his cause by this jest."

So many examples, old and new, are sufficient to show that, rightly or wrongly, the substitution of "had" for "would" and "would have" has been accepted in English literature. Whether this short form is a gain to the language is a question that might be profitably discussed. Whatever may be the advantage in brevity in some of the instances cited, it can scarcely be alleged that either in brevity or in elegance "*I had* rather" is an improvement upon "*I would* rather," and that the actors would not do well, when they address the players in that memorable piece of good advice, to say, "*I would* as lief the town crier spoke my lines," instead of "*I had* as lief." This last unfortunate expression seems to be the fount and origin of what must be considered a perversion of the word had from its true meaning, and which has thence spread into literature, and produced other perversions, made after its own image. Great writers lead and the people preserve, though they do not create the language; and our great writers as well as the small should look to it, that they do not corrupt the very noble inheritance of language which they have derived from their ancestors.

AN EXPERIENCE.

IN TWO CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

It was on a warm, early June afternoon that I was called into the consulting-room to see her.

It was out of the usual hours for seeing patients, and I remember that I resented the interruption, and the irregularity; for I was busy in the anatomical department of the hospital, deep in the study of an extraordinarily interesting specimen of—but, you won't care for these details.

However, when I read the note of introduction she had brought with her, I

was reconciled to the disturbance; the rather, because it seemed that just such a case as we had long been lying in wait for, now presented itself.

I was then young; an enthusiast in my profession, full of faith in science and in one whom I will call Dr. Fearnwell, under whom I had chiefly studied; without any consciousness of other kind of faith.

I was ambitious; up to this time, iron-nerved and hard-headed; possibly, I should add, hard-hearted. Yet I don't know that I was specially callous, careless, or cruel. It was more because such culture as I had had, was exclusively of the head, that I knew nothing about having a heart, than that I did not care to have one.

I believed myself to have, and I gloried in having, unusual power of brain. As many men I knew, boasted of the many hours they could run, row, or ride, I boasted of the many hours I could read hard and work hard. I had never spared myself, and, up to this time of which I write, had never had any warning that it might be wise to do so.

I dimly suspect, however, that this warning was on its way, that even without the shock of which I am going to tell, some crash would have come.

I remember that when I was interrupted to read the note which the porter brought me, the perspiration was streaming from my forehead. And yet the afternoon, though warm, was not sultry. And I had been employed in a way that called for extreme delicacy and accuracy of investigation and observation: not for physical force.

"Won't you wash your hands, sir, first? It's a woman and a child," was the suggestion of the good-hearted porter.

Though with some muttered expletives against the folly of such "fiddle-faddle," I took the man's hint, and, also, buttoned my coat over my shirt front, and pushed my wristbands up out of sight.

The venetian-blinds were down in the consulting-room, for the afternoon sun poured against its windows. Thus, until my eyes a little accustomed themselves to the dimness of the room I could not well distinguish its occupants.

After a few moments I saw the palest woman, of the most corpse-like pallor, I ever, before or since, beheld. She was seated near a table, with a female child of some two or three years old upon her knees.

She did not rise when I went in. Possibly—probably—she could not. A wo-

man with a face like that, could hardly stand up and hold so large a child. She wore a widow's cap, its border brought so close round her face as hardly to show an indication of hair. Her eyebrows were dark, at once decided and delicate; her eyelashes were peculiarly long and full, still darker than the brows, and almost startlingly conspicuous on the dead white of a fair-skinned face. Not even on her lips, was there, now, any tinge of other colour.

The child upon her knees was a little miracle of exquisite loveliness. But I noticed little of this then.

At the first moment of being in this woman's presence, I felt some slight embarrassment. I had expected to see "a common person." I felt that about this woman there was something, in all senses, uncommon.

My embarrassment was not lessened by the steady earnestness with which she fixed her deep dark eyes on mine, nor by the first words she spoke, slowly moving those white lips:

"You are very young; surely it is not to you, the letter I brought was addressed! You are very young."

The voice was the fit voice to come from such a corpse-like face. It was not her ordinary voice, any more than that was her ordinary (or could have been any living woman's ordinary) complexion.

I was still young enough to be annoyed at looking "very young." I was impatient of my own embarrassment under her searching study of my face. I answered, rather roughly:

"My time is valuable; let me know what I can do for you—unless, indeed, you think me 'too young' to do anything."

"It may be the better that you are so young," she said. There had been no relaxation in her study of me, and her voice now was a little more like a natural voice—like *her* natural voice, as I afterwards learned to know it only too well; soft and sweet; a slow and measured, but intense, music. "Being so young, you must remember something of your mother's love. It is not likely your mother loved you as I love this child of mine; still, no doubt, she loved you; and you remembering her love, may have some pity left in you for all mothers. This child of mine is all I have; my only hold on hope in this world, or in another. Life does not seem long enough to love her in; without her, one day's life would seem impossible."

Striving against the awe that *would* steal over me, looking into that solemn face, fixed by those deep still eyes, hearing that solemn voice, I said, with brusque impatience:

"I have told you my time is valuable. If you wish me to do anything, at once tell me what."

"Have you not read the letter I brought?"

"I have; but that explains nothing."

"My child is lame."

"That much I know."

"I am ready to answer any questions about what you do not know."

Then I questioned her as to the nature, extent, and what she thought probable cause, of her child's lameness. She answered always in few, fit words. I examined the child: she watching me with those deep, still eyes of hers. My heightened colour, my increasing animation, my eager looks, seemed to stir her a little.

My interest was thoroughly roused. This was exactly such a case as we desired to experiment upon; a case in which to try a new operation, on the success of which, under fair conditions, I was ready to stake all I cared for in life. She, with that monstrous egotism of maternity, mistook me so far as that she took my interest to be concentrated on this one sufferer.

"Can she be cured?" was asked so hungrily by the whole face that there was no need for the lips to form the words.

"Yes, yes, yes!" I answered, with joyous triumphant confidence. "She can be cured! She shall be! She shall walk as well as the best of us!"

Before I knew what was happening—not that there was any quickness of movement, but that I was utterly unprepared for any such demonstration—the woman was on her knees at my feet. With one hand she held the child; with the other she had taken my hand, on which she pressed her lips.

There was a speechless rapture over her face, and the most exquisite soft flush upon it, as she did this.

A queer feeling came over me, as I awkwardly withdrew my hand—my hand that for a long time afterwards tingled with consciousness of the touch of the woman's lips.

She rose, with no awkwardness, no haste; reseatd herself, bent over, and kissed her child.

The child had been always watching us, its soft serious unchildlike eyes fixed

sometimes on me, and sometimes on its mother. I had never before, and have never since, seen anything like that child's eyes. They—but why voluntarily recal them, when the effort of my life for so long, was to keep them from always floating before me!

Suddenly the woman's face resumed its deadly pallor.

"Will it be very painful?" she asked.

"That is as you will."

"What do you mean?"

I explained. It was my advice that she should let her child be put to sleep with the then newly-discovered agent, chloroform.

"Is there danger in it?"

"None—if the stuff is carefully administered, as, I need not say, it shall be to your child. You can understand how difficult it is to keep a child still enough under pain, to give an operator a fair chance."

"It would be difficult with any other child, perhaps: with mine it is not difficult. She is so docile, so patient: she would keep still, and bear, uncomplainingly, anything I asked her to bear. She has already undergone great agony from a fruitless attempt at cure. But, of course, if, indeed, there is no danger, I would wish"—here she paused—"oh the weak folly of words! to save my darling pain."

"Do you judge your child to have a good constitution? The extreme debility you speak of, is preternatural."

She answered me eagerly, assuring me that her child, except for this lameness, which she considered to be not the result of constitutional disease but of an accident, had always had perfect health. She added:

"You are too young for me to tell my story to, or I might, by the circumstances of her birth, account to you for her extreme docility."

I then questioned her as to what had been done in attempt to cure the child, and I blamed her for not having at first come to us.

With perfect simplicity she gave me the incredible answer that she had never, till a few weeks since, heard of "us." Then, when she had replied to all my questions, seeming to win confidence in me, because of my confidence in cure, she spoke to me, with quiet intensity, of the child's peculiar preciousness to her.

To this I listened, or seemed to listen, patiently.

I was conscious that she was speaking to me; I was also conscious of her child's eyes watching me; but while she spoke and the child watched, I was arranging for the operation, the when, the how, all the details. There were difficulties in my way, obstacles to be surmounted. I was not at all sure of winning Dr. Fearnwell's consent that this child should be the first subject upon which the new operation should be tried. Dr. Fearnwell had said, I remembered, "We must first try this on some coarsely-born child, some child of robust peasant parents: some child, too, who, should its life be sacrificed, would be, poor little wretch! no loss, and no great loser."

I had more faith in Dr. Fearnwell always, than Dr. Fearnwell had in himself. I had, also, more faith in science than the more experienced man had. Besides this, Dr. Fearnwell was of extreme sensitiveness and tender-heartedness; his hand could be firmer than any, and his courage cooler, but he required first to be convinced of the unquestionable beneficence of the torture he inflicted.

Dr. Fearnwell's seeing this child beforehand would be a risk (when I looked at it with Dr. Fearnwell's eyes, I recognised its extreme fragility), but his hearing the mother speak of it, and of its extreme preciousness to her, would be fatal. He would warn, and question, and caution, till the woman's courage would fail; he would think it better that the widow should keep her lame child, than run the risk of losing it to cure its lameness. He was quite capable of telling her that this lameness would not kill, and that the attempt to cure it might; and then how could one expect a poor, weak, selfish woman to decide?

Once interested in the woman, Dr. Fearnwell would think nothing of the glory to science, and the gain to the human race, of successful operation, compared with the loss to this woman if she should lose her child.

This "weakness" (so I thought it) of Dr. Fearnwell's filled me with something as like contempt as it was possible for me to feel towards one who was my hero. Against it, I determined as far as possible to protect him. Though I had no consciousness that the child's eyes touched me, I knew how they would appeal to Dr. Fearnwell.

While the mother talked, therefore, I was scheming and contriving. I received the sounds of her words on my ear, and they conveyed corresponding ideas to my brain;

for afterwards I knew things she then, and only then, told me. But at the time I heard without hearing, in the same way that we often see without seeing, things that vividly reproduce themselves afterwards.

"When can it be done?"

That question brought her speaking and my thinking to a pause.

"Do you stay here long?"

"Not longer than is needful for my child. I am poor. It is dear living in a strange place. But anything that is needful for my child is possible."

"If it can be done at all, it shall be done within the week."

"If it can be done at all!" You said it could be done; you said it should be done."

The way in which this was said, the look in the eyes with which it was said, revealed something of the stormy possibilities of this woman's nature.

"I spoke with indiscreet haste when I said it could and should be done. There are many difficulties."

I then explained the nature of those difficulties in the manner I thought most politic, and most calculated to induce her to connive with me in overcoming them. I dwelt much on the morbid over-sensitiveness which would paralyse the hand of the good doctor, were she to speak to him as she had spoken to me about the extreme preciousness of her child.

She studied my face with a new intensity; then she said:

"He need know nothing about me. I need not see him till all is arranged. The child can, for him, be anybody's child."

"Exactly what I would desire. I am glad to find you so sensible. Bring the child here to-morrow morning, at ten."

White to the lips again, she faltered:

"You don't mean that it will be done to-morrow?"

"No, no, no. No such luck as that," I answered, impatiently. "There are preliminaries to be gone through. The child will have to be examined by a council of surgeons. All that is nothing to you. Bring her to me, here, at ten to-morrow. That is all I ask of you. This is my name"—giving her a card—"You know from the superscription of the note you brought me, that my name is Bertram Dowlass. You may trust me to do the best I can for you."

She rose to take leave.

The quiet intensity of her gratitude, and her implicit, patient belief in me, did not

touch me. I let these things pass me by; there was no contact.

"I have no claim whatever on your gratitude," was my most true answer to what she said. "It is not the cure of your child that I care about, but the proof that human skill, aided by science, can cure thousands."

She smiled slightly, in gentle deprecation of my self-injustice—perhaps, too, in incredulity of my indifference towards her child.

That was the end of our first interview.

All the rest of that day I worked with divided attention, and with a strange unsettled feeling. This was a new experience, and it made me uneasy. Ordinarily I was my own master. I now put on the screw as I had never had to do before, and with little result beyond a painful sense of strain and effort.

It was natural that I should be under some excitement. I would not own to myself that my excitement was more than natural; nor would I, for an instant, listen to any internal suggestion that it had any other cause than that to which I chose to attribute it.

At the appointed time next morning, she brought the child.

There was no quailing yet, as I had feared there might be. She was still intent upon the cure, still full of confidence in me.

When she gave the small soft creature into my hold, and it put one of its little arms round my neck, voluntarily, confidently—I experienced a sensation I had never before known.

It turned out as I had expected. I had a hard battle to fight; my patience and temper were pretty well tried.

Dr. Fearnwell took the small being upon his knee, stroked its hair, looked into its eyes, felt its arms, and declared that this was not a safe case for operation; that the child was too delicate.

I and one or two others, equally bent on testing the new discovery, at last overruled his judgment, and carried our point—not till I was conscious of the perspiration standing in great beads on my forehead. I do not know that I exactly lied about the little thing, but I deliberately allowed Dr. Fearnwell to suppose that the child's position was such that it had far better die than live a cripple—possibly had better die than live at all; that it was a child whose existence in the world was an inconve-

nience rather than anything else, and a constant memorial of what was best forgotten.

I was flushed with triumph when I returned to Mrs. Ross-car—so she called herself—bearing the child in my arms.

"With the sweat of my brow, I have earned the healing of your child," I said to her, as I wiped my forehead.

She was standing up close to the door; her arms eagerly received the burden of mine; her tongue made me no answer, but her face replied to me.

"On Monday at eleven," I told her. "This is Thursday. In the intervening days, keep your child as quiet as you can: give her as much fresh air and as much nourishing food as you can. Dr. Fearnwell sent you this"—slipping five sovereigns into her hand—"to help to pay your expenses. He will help you as much as you may find necessary. He is rich and kind. You need have no scruples."

The money was my own; it would have been more, but that I was short of funds just then. Her face had flushed.

"I take the money for my child's sake. I thank him for my child's sake," she said, proudly.

I was now waiting for her to go.

The door of the room was open; she stood facing the opening, and the light from the great stair-window fell full upon her.

For the first time I noted her great beauty.

She was still young, I daresay, but hers was not the beauty that depends upon the first freshness of youth. It was the beauty of perfectly harmonious proportion. Her form was at least as perfect as her countenance. She had the most statuesque grace I ever saw in living woman, as she stood there holding her child; holding it with no more effort than a Hebe shows in holding the cup of nectar.

Her deep, still eyes were fastened upon me. A curious shock went through me, even before she spoke.

Her face had now again that extreme pallor, such as I had never seen on any other living face.

"On Monday, at eleven," she repeated. Her marble-pale lips seemed stiffening to marble-rigidity. They seemed to form the words with difficulty. "You would not deceive me? There is not more danger than you tell me? Forgive me; but, now it is settled, my heart seems turning to ice. You would not deceive me? I know something of the callousness, the cruelty, of men; but this

would be too cruel. In all this world I have, as I have told you, nothing but this," hugging the child as she spoke, closer to that breast whose superb lines were not to be wholly hidden by the heavy muffling weeds she wore. "I have nothing but this to hope for, to work for, to live for. This is all I have saved from the past, all that is left to me in the future."

Her delicate dark brows gathered themselves threateningly over her intense eyes, as she added, in a soft deep voice:

"There would be one thing left for me to do if I lost my child. One thing, and only one. To curse the hand—whether it were the hand of God or of man—that took her from me."

I answered her coldly; as far as I could, carelessly. I steeled myself against the tragic truth of her words; but I was conscious of a creeping of my flesh.

"Madam," I said, "you are at liberty to change your mind. All arrangements that have been made, can be unmade. I would, however, advise you to avoid agitating the child."

This drew her eyes from mine to the small face on her breast. She had not raised her voice, had not indulged in any gesture; had not betrayed, except in the blanching of her face and the intense passion of her eyes, her agitation; the child was too young to understand her words. And yet, as we both looked at it now, its lips had parted, its face had flushed, its eyes and mouth and chin were quivering with emotion.

Perhaps the little creature was distressed by the vibrations of its mother's strongly-pulsating heart, against which it was held so closely.

She bent over it, held her face against its face, murmured soothing sounds. I was holding the door open. She now passed out without another word, and began to descend the stairs.

I stood looking after her: my eyes were caught by the glorious great knot of bright hair, which, all pulled back from her face, escaped from her bonnet behind. A slanting beam from the window had touched and fired it as she passed down the stairs.

Half-way down she stopped, turned, and looked back and up at me. When the mother looked, her child looked too. They remained so, for perhaps half a minute.

How often afterwards, in dreams of the night, in waking visions of the dark, and worse, far worse, in the broad daylight and peopling the sunshine, looking up from the

grass, or from the water, looking forth from the trees, or the flowers, hovering between her and other faces, did I meet those haunting eyes: the two pairs of eyes, so like in their difference, gazing at me with varying expressions of appeal, reproach, agony, or—worst of all—resignation!

"Good-evening, Mrs. Ross-car."

I turned back into the room, but could not hinder myself, a few moments after, from looking out to see if she were still there. She was gone.

During the Friday and Saturday intervening between that day and the Monday, I hardly thought of the mother and child. I thought constantly, and with feverish eagerness, of the operation, and of the triumph of its success; but I did not realise the quivering agony of body and spirit—the child's body (even if all sensation were deadened for the moments of operation, there must be keen suffering afterwards), the mother's spirit—implied even in success. As to failure, I did not admit its possibility.

On the Sunday I was restless. I felt it needful to do something. I could not apply to book-study, and from the more practical part of study the day shut me off. I got on board one of the river steamers, not designing anything but to get out in the country, and have a good walk. But the first person my eye fell on, when I looked round the crowded deck, was Mrs. Ross-car; her child, of course, in her arms.

For a moment I felt afraid lest this might mean that my patient was escaping me.

"Where are you going?" I asked her, abruptly.

"I do not know," she answered, with her quiet voice and rare smile. "You recommended me to give the child all the air I could. I thought of landing at one of the pleasant green places, and sitting about in the fields for a few hours, and then taking the evening boat back again. I thought, at some farmhouse or small inn, I could get some food for her—at all events, milk and eggs and bread-and-butter."

I was standing on the deck, in front of her. I said, what suddenly occurred to me:

"You are much too beautiful and too young, to go about alone in this way, among such people."

"I dare say I am beautiful, and I know I am not old; but my beauty is not of the sort to draw on me the impertinence of common people. I am not young in my soul. I know how to protect myself."

"If you don't mind my company, I'll manage for you. You are not strong enough to slave about with that weight always in your arms. You can do it, I know; but you should not overtax your strength to-day; your nerves should be in good order to-morrow."

She blanched, suddenly, to that absolute pallor again.

"Will they let me be in the room? Will they let her lie in my lap?" she asked.

I shook my head.

"In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred this would not answer, though it might in yours; it is difficult to make exceptions."

She gave a patient sigh; sat some time with her eyes fixed on the gliding shore; then said, looking at me again:

"Will it take long?"

"Oh, no, no; a very short time; a few moments."

"And she will feel no pain?"

"None."

She said, as if to herself, her eyes subsiding from my face to settle on the shore again:

"After all, God is sometimes merciful. I almost feel as if I could love Him. When these little feet"—touching them with a tender hand—"walk, I will try with all my soul to love Him."

I don't know what possessed me this day. I laid aside all my habitual shyness. I hardly thought of exposing myself to the ridicule of my colleagues, should I encounter any of them. But thinking of this chance, I glanced at Mrs. Rosscar's dress; trying to discover how she would strike a stranger, and to what rank she would be supposed to belong.

Of the dress I could make nothing; it was all deep and long-worn mourning. As far as I could tell, nothing of her station could be learned from her dress.

She was standing. She had moved to the side of the vessel, a little way apart from me. She was pointing out something to the child. From the poise of her head, down all the lines of her form, to the firmly-planted beautiful foot, from which, by times, the wind swept back the drapery, there was something regal about her. The child was daintily dressed in white; it looked all soft swansdown and delicate embroideries. It might, I thought, have been a queen's child.

I went to her side, and proposed that we should land at the first stopping place, and take a row-boat. She agreed. She would have agreed to anything I proposed; she

had a feeling that the child's life was in my hand. So, we were soon gliding along the shady bank of the river—she and I and the child—sometimes, among the water-lilies and close to the swans; sometimes, almost touched by drooping boughs; sometimes, for a moment held entangled by the sedges. All very silent.

Mrs. Rosscar was one of those women who have a talent for silence, and, more than that, who seem hardly to need speech. To-day she was content to watch the child. The child sat on her knees, with musing eyes and tranquil face, watching the gliding water.

Now and then, the child smiled up into the mother's face; now and then, the mother bent over and kissed the child; there seemed no need, between them, for any other kind of speech. That child's smile was of the most wonderful sad sweetness. It was the loveliest and tenderest expression. I did not then, you must understand, consciously note all the things I speak of as I go along; they returned upon me afterwards. I had time enough, in time to come, to remember the past. Time enough, Heaven knows!

Early in the afternoon, we stopped at a comparatively unfrequented place, and dined.

Mrs. Rosscar's quiet undemonstrative, and yet pleased and grateful, acceptance of all my services, her acquiescence in all I proposed, did not seem to me strange. The day was altogether a dream-day. I was in the sort of mood in which to find myself the hero of a fairy-tale's adventures would hardly have surprised me: a most unwonted mood for me.

I have thought about it since, and wondered if she acted as she did, from inexperience, or from indifference. Was she ignorant, or was she careless, as to what might be concluded about her? I believe the fact was, that she thought neither of herself, nor of me, but merely of "a good day" for the child.

She laid aside her bonnet, and her cap with it, before she sat down to table: showing that wealth of brown hair, and, what much more interested me, that head fit to be the head of a goddess. "And yet," I thought, "she seems a very ordinary woman; she seems, even more foolishly than most women, absorbed and satisfied by the possession of a child."

In laying aside her bonnet and cap, she had laid aside, also, her shapeless cloak; her close-fitting black dress displayed the

lines of shoulders, bust, and waist, fit to be those of that same goddess.

She was a splendid *woman*. The well-formed white soft hands made me conclude that she was also, by conventional rank, a lady.

We returned as we had come; only that the sunset mirrored in the river, the swans, the sedges, the rippling run of the water, the capricious warm breathings of the soft wind seemed, yet more than the morning brightness, things of a dream. We reached the widow's lodging at about the child's bedtime.

She did not ask me to go in, but I went in.

She told the child to thank me for "a happy, happy time;" which the little thing did with a prettiness pathetic to think of afterwards, adding, of her own accord:

"And for showing me the lilies and the pretty swans."

The mother hung on her words with rapture, and then, raising her face to mine, said:

"If you make my child able to walk in the warm sunny grass, on her own little feet, I will learn to believe in a loving God, that I may call His choicest blessings down upon you. I will entreat Him to prosper you in all your doings, to gladden your whole life, to let the love of women and of little children sweeten all your days."

I pressed, in parting, the hand she held out to me. After I had left her, her last words went echoing through my brain.

When I got home I tried to apply myself to hard study—quite vainly. But I do not think that she, alone, was responsible for this. I believe that, just at the time when I first met her, my brain was on the point of giving-in, and of resenting the strain of some years.

This phase, at all events, of my collapse, had a strange deliciousness about it. Soft thoughts and sweet fancies thronged upon me. I gave myself up to them, weary of the effort of self-mastery.

Again and again, as I fell asleep, I was gliding softly down a sunny river. I seemed to hear the dip and splash of oars, to feel the movement of the boat under the impulse given by them, and then the words, "May the love of women and of little children sweeten all your days!" sounded in my ears with such distinctness, and seemed to come from a voice so near, that I awoke with a start, and a feeling that I should see the speaker standing beside my bed, and that I had felt her breath upon my brow.

Then, like a fool as I was, I lay thinking of the woman who had spoken those words. "What a rich low voice she has; what sweet deep eyes she has; what a shapely foot she has; what a splendid form it is; what a soft white steady hand she has!"

"Yes," I then said to myself, trying to deceive myself. "She would make a first-rate hospital nurse; strong, calm, gentle, wise."

Next day, a day of intense excitement to me, the operation was performed. It was successfully performed. Everything that happened at about this time, after that Sunday on the river, seems wrapped in a dream-haze.

But I have a distinct recollection that Dr. Fearnwell said to me, "Dowlass, you are over-doing it; I don't like the look of your eyes; take a holiday." But whether this was before the operation, or after it, I don't know. I know that I made him some jesting answer, and laughed at his grave concern.

I know that late in that day, when I first saw Mrs. Rossicar after the operation, her expression of her passionate joy and gratitude made me half delirious with an uncomprehended feeling—and that part of it was *fear*.

The child, after the operation, was placed in one of the wards of the hospital. The mother left it neither night nor day. I had prevailed in getting this exception to rule allowed; and for this her gratitude was almost as great as for our other success.

Through the day after the operation, and the day following that, I often stole a few moments to go and look at the little patient sufferer, and at the joy-illuminated radiant face of the mother. The more radiant the mother's face was, and the more entirely all seemed well, the more I felt afraid.

When, on the third day, the child sank—died in its sleep—I knew it was of that, I had been afraid.

I cannot even now account for the child's death. It should have lived and grown strong; there was no inflammation; the success of the operation was perfect.

Perhaps it was a child born not to live. Perhaps the constant presence of its mother made it keep up too strong a strain of self-control, for its strength. It must have suffered, but it did not moan, or cry, or give any sign of suffering, except what was to be read on the often-damp brow and in the over-dilated eyes. "Eyes!" Yes. It is always "eyes." Eyes are always haunt-

ing me. Often the child's eyes, as they looked up at me, when I bent over it. I have fancied since that it would have spoken to me then, complained of pain, but for the mother being always close and within hearing. I have fancied since, that it looked at me, with that intent look, hoping that I should understand.

A poor sickly tree—I think a sycamore—grew outside one of the windows of the ward in which the child lay. It was swaying and swinging in the evening wind and evening sunlight, and its shadow was waving to and fro on the child's bed when I went into the ward on the afternoon of that third day.

The child liked to watch the shadow and had begged not to have the blind pulled down.

"Had I best wake her?" Mrs. Ross-car asked me, the moment I approached the bed. She was looking strained to-day, and anxious. "It is rather long since she took nourishment. And last time she was awake, I thought she seemed more weak and faint than she has seemed since Monday."

"When was she last awake?"

Mrs. Ross-car looked at her watch.

"Half an hour and three minutes ago; but she took nothing then, for she smiled at me, and then dozed off, just as I was going to give her her arrowroot and wine. It is an hour and a half since she had anything."

"By all means wake her," I said. It struck me that her little face looked pinched and cold. "The sleep of exhaustion will do her no good," I added.

Mrs. Ross-car bent her face over the child's face. I stood by, with my heart striking sledge-hammer blows against me.

"Mamma wants her darling to wake up and take some wine," she said, with her cheek lying against the child's cheek.

No movement or murmur of reply.

Lifting her head, and looking into my face, she said, in what then seemed to me an awful voice:

"She is very cold!"

I pushed the mother aside, I bent over the child, I felt for its pulse, watched for its breath. In vain.

I ordered flannels to be heated, and the little body to be wrapped in them and rubbed with them. I tried every means I knew of, for restoring animation.

In vain.

While the mother was preparing food for it, the child, having smiled at her, had fallen into a doze. That doze was the doze of death.

When we desisted from our efforts to wake it, and left the poor tortured little body in peace, Mrs. Ross-car, who had been kneeling by the bed, rose. She stood motionless and speechless for moments that seemed to me no portion of time, but an experience of eternity.

I resolved that I *would not* meet her eyes; but she was the stronger willed, and our eyes did meet. I shrank; I shivered; I looked, I know, abject, craven, self-convicted. I felt I was the murderer she thought me.

Slowly, with her eyes on mine which watched her with a horrible fascination, she lifted her grand arms, and clasped her hands above her head.

The uplifted arms, the awful eyes, the indefinite horror of that pause before speech were enough for me.

As her lips opened, to give utterance to the first words of her curse, I, lifting my own arms, as if to ward off from my head an imminent blow (they told me afterwards of these things), and struggling for power to articulate some deprecation—I, meeting her eyes with unspeakable horror in my own, staggered a moment, then fell, as if she had struck me down.

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